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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001909

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: NO POLITICAL SETTLEMENT IN WARRI YET

REF: ABUJA 1234

Classified by Political Counselor James Maxstadt for reasons
1.5 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: While sporadic fighting among the Ijaw, Uhrobo and Itsekiri continues in the creeks of Warri, the debate is intensifying among Nigerians over how to resolve political grievances underlying the Warri crisis. Ijaw and Itsekiri leaders -- each backing rival policies -- are putting pressure on President Obasanjo to settle the debate in their favor or face greater instability in the Warri area.
End Summary

2. (C) The 2003 rounds of fighting in Warri, part of a recurring conflict almost 10 years old, is largely over resource control -- the establishment of local rights over prime oil producing territory, and deciding just who is "local." Itsekiris see themselves as the hereditary "landlords" of the Warri kingdom and the Ijaws as "tenants" who arrived in the area recently (the past century) and are encroaching on Itsekiri turf. The Ijaws of Warri, three of over 20 Ijaw clans in Nigeria, feel they are the politically marginalized majority denied their fair share of the lucrative royalties from oil produced in their home areas.

3. (C) The resource control fight is defined in terms of political representation, specifically the local government areas (LGAs) dominated by each group and the division of electoral wards within those LGAs. Itsekiri have long controlled the area now encompassed by the three LGAs of Warri -- Warri North, Warri South, and Warri Southwest. Chairmen of these local governments have been Itsekiri, as have most of the Commissioners in these local governments. In practical terms, this means that federal funds allocated to the three Warri LGAs are largely disbursed for the benefit of Itsekiri residents. Ijaws are the majority outside the three Warri LGAs, and feel they are now the majority in Warri Southwest and a sizable, yet unrepresented population in the other two LGAs. The Itsekiri feel they ceded other areas near Warri (e.g. Sapele LGA) to Ijaw and Uhrobo populations that are now trying to crowd them from the three Warri LGAs -- one step away from losing everything.

FOUR SPUTTERING RESOLUTION EFFORTS -- Danjuma Report

4. (C) Created by President Obasanjo as a Committee Chaired by then-Defense Minister Theophilus Danjuma, the Warri Crisis Committee continued under Danjuma's leadership after the April 2003 elections. Danjuma summoned delegations of elders from the three warring factions -- Uhrobo, Itsekiri and Ijaw -- to Abuja or to the Delta State capital of Asaba. Numerous participating representatives from the three groups tell us that the limited number of full Committee meetings were characterized by highly polarized recitations of each group's position or demands. By the end of August, Danjuma had drafted and submitted a report to Obasanjo on the Committee's deliberations, though he did not share this draft with the committee's ethnic-representative participants. The report, while cited often, has yet to be distributed outside the Presidential Villa. Comments from sources close to the President and the Danjuma Committee's work, however, suggest the report contains little in the way of detailed proposals to resolve the issues.

The Delta State Government "Road Map"

5. (C) Delta State Governor Chief James Ibori spent significant time in dialogue with the warring factions from April 2003. With great fanfare, in May Ibori moved his office from the State capital (Asaba) to Warri, and pledged he would remain in Warri until a viable peace plan had been

forged. After several weeks of traveling in June and July through the Warri communities affected by the fighting, Ibori began speaking of a "Road Map for Peace in Warri." This plan is grounded on the assumption that the warring parties have gone beyond the point of return to their previous, peaceful coexistence, and therefore calls for new LGAs or District Councils (the local administrative unit seen during the military years) delineated along ethnic lines to be created out of the existing three Warri LGAs. While this would give Ijaws heretofore unseen political representation in Warri (separate from the many LGAs controlled by Ijaws outside of Warri), it would further diminish the political turf of the micro-minority Itsekiri who currently dominate only three LGAs in all of Nigeria.

Obasanjo's Intervention

16. (C) Ibori's road map was dealt a severe blow on September 9, when Obasanjo visited Warri and met with leaders of the three ethnic groups in Effurun, outside Warri town. During that meeting, the President strongly urged the warring groups to pursue "accommodation" of each other's interests and demands as the way to achieve peace in the area. Obasanjo heaped scorn on proposals to re-divide the area into more new local government areas (LGAs), saying that such division would only accentuate differences and further fuel the crisis. This public criticism was widely interpreted as targeting Governor Ibori, who has drawn President Obasanjo's ire in the past. The Itsekiri were the only party to applaud the President's stance, and Obasanjo has not provided a concrete political plan of actions to take instead of creating new LGAs.

Military Threats

17. (C) Ijaw leaders responded viscerally to President Obasanjo's rejection of new LGAs, threatening renewed violence in the region. At Obasanjo's September 9 meeting with the ethnic leaders, Ijaw Chief Mamamu -- who was standing in for Chief E.K. Clark -- told the President directly that the Ijaw would return to violence if their demands for new LGAs were not met. Ijaw youth groups, including the FNDIC militants, have echoed this threat in recent discussions with Mission officers traveling to the Warri area. In a November 1 phone conversation with CRO, Clark confirmed the accuracy of October 30 press reports of the Ijaw leader's open criticism of Obasanjo. Clark, who returned to Warri October 29 after two months of medical leave in the U.K., stated that the President must not be allowed to block the creation of new ethnically-defined LGAs.

18. (C) Although upwards of four battalions of Nigerian military have been deployed to the Delta for some months to deal with such threats, thus far the military has stuck to its bases. Essentially the Nigerian military has not ended either the threat or the capacity for violence by the Ijaws, nor have the Ijaws been able to gain their demands.

Comment

19. (C) Obasanjo's appeal for "accommodation" among the three feuding groups rings hollow in light of federal development assistance to Warri not increasing on the ground, and federal security personnel not being able to date to restore law and order across the Delta. Governor Ibori's plan to divide Warri into ethnically-delineated LGAs seems to be the only political solution on the table. Ibori's return from Warri to Asaba reflects his unhappiness with Obasanjo; nevertheless, Ibori will likely push his "Road Map" through the Delta State Assembly (which he controls) and maybe through the National Assembly in Abuja. Obasanjo may not like the uninspiring report from Danjuma, but he has not put out any other political alternative in his effort to block Ibori from dividing Warri into ethnic enclaves. The military alternative has not succeeded yet, for Obasanjo or for the Ijaws. While no political solution to Warri's problems can end the fighting absolutely, not having a political solution absolutely guarantees continued instability in this oil-rich swamp.
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